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UNCLAS ALGIERS 001304

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PHUM PTER AG

SUBJECT: AMARI SAIFI AKA ABDERREZAK AL-PARA SENTENCED IN
ABSTENTIA TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT

¶1. (U) According to Algerian press reports June 25, 2005, the Algerian militant and former number two of the al-Qaida linked Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), Amari Saifi aka Abderrazak Al-Para, was sentenced in abstentia to life in prison for organizing a terrorist group and for spreading terror among the population. On trial also were five of his accomplices, though only two of the five were present at the one-day trial; both were sentenced to two years in prison. Three others were acquitted.

¶2. (U) Al-Para is considered the mastermind behind the summer 2003 kidnappings of 32 European tourists, mostly German, one of whom died of heatstroke in the Sahara Desert. He is also responsible for the killings of 43 Algerian soldiers in January that same year and a 2002 attack which killed 10 people. Al-Para will also stand trial for these individual criminal acts, according to press accounts.

COMMENT

¶3. (SBU) In response to a lawyer's query regarding al-Para's absence, the presiding judge remarked, "For (purposes of) Algerian justice, Amari Saifi is not under detention." No further explanation was provided, however, leading to the possibility that the police never turned al-Para over to judicial authorities after his maximum 12 days of detention. Al-Para's in absentia sentencing may also be a result of perceived security threats should he to physically attend the trial. ERDMAN